FREEDOM WATCH

The Citizens Project Newsletter

Vol. 2, No. 4 August 1993

CITIZENS PROJECT GENERAL MEETING

Citizens Project held its second General Meeting at Palmer High School on July 11. 400 people braved the driving rain to celebrate our first anniversary with a rousing rendition of "Happy Birthday." Following a strong keynote speech by local attorney Greg Walta, members of the Board of Directors detailed past activities, present situation, and future direction of Citizens Project. Participants then broke into neighborhood groups to talk about local issues and discuss forming smaller affiliated groups.

The General Meeting

Local attorney and evangelical Christian Greg Walta (author of the Walta Amendment) spoke on the subject of whether Citizens Project is anti-Christian. His comments, reproduced on page two, are powerful and to the point.

Colorado College professor Bruce Loeffler detailed a number of inaccurate images that some in our community entertain about Citizens Project. Is Citizens Project a front organization for gay rights, anti-Christian, or radical left? After discussing these myths, Bruce summed up our response succinctly: "Poppycock!" [Bruce Loeffler, as you may recall, has recently become famous for his Forum article in the July 13 Gazette-Telegraph, which was followed by an avalanche of letters to the editor discussing diversity, religion in our public schools, and the religious right in general.]

Dave Porter discussed Citizens Project's revised vision and mission statements and detailed the process by which the Citizens Project steering committee developed these statements. Our vision and mission statements will guide us in our community work in the future (see box on Page 4).

Amy Divine spoke of the past accomplishments of our organization and about our goals for the coming year. Some of these goals include informing our participants about the positions of school board candidates in the upcoming November school board election, continuing to research groups whose objectives threaten constitutional freedoms, launching a "Many Voices" campaign to encourage local media to more accurately represent the diversity of our community, and organizing "Dialogue Dinners" where small groups of individuals with different backgrounds and beliefs can meet informally to foster greater understanding.

The Neighborhood Meetings

After the larger general meeting, participants broke into smaller meetings based on their neighborhood. Groups discussed a number of issues, including school concerns, community values, censorship, and Amendment 2. Some groups plan to continue meeting, while others will meet again when appropriate neighborhood issues arise. Citizens Project will support these and other neighborhood groups that form. Our Neighborhood Group Handbook is available to those who are interested in starting or joining a group (see the box on Page 3).

Our Thanks To You

We at the Citizens Project office are gratified by the turnout at the General Meeting. We appreciate your support by attending meetings, by your interest in our activities, by your willingness to volunteer, and by your continued financial support.

Citizens Project has come a long way in the last year, and we look forward to more progress in the future. We agree with Greg Walta when he said, "Times are going to be tough in Colorado Springs." But with your assistance, we will continue to promote the traditional American values of tolerance and diversity in our community.

Citizens Project Growth

Citizens Project started in June 1992. We are now just over one year old, and we have seen quite a number of changes over the last year.

We have expanded from two people to over 6,000 participants. We have moved from a cramped basement room to downtown offices (albeit still cramped). We have changed from a part-time operation to a full-time organization with two paid staff and a multitude of volunteer workers essential to our activities. We have expanded from pocket change financing to a budget of nearly $80,000 per year. Through our "Celebrate Diversity" campaign, our research and seminars, and our work in schools and local politics, Citizens Project has helped our community take notice of the increasing number of people who believe pluralism and tolerance are values worth celebrating and are not afraid to say so.

Citizens Project has encouraged new discussions about the growing polarization of values and about the importance of diversity in our community. Judging from the stories in our local newspapers and the letters to the editor, those discussions are most timely. We must be doing something right!

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Citizens Project forming new Neighborhood Groups

VALUES AT CITIZENS PROJECT

The following speech was given by Greg Walta, keynote speaker at the July Citizens Project General Meeting. Greg is a Colorado Springs attorney and an evangelical Christian.

Recently, I have noticed a strong effort to portray Citizens Project as an anti-Christian organization. I come here tonight as a Christian to rise to the defense of this organization and to the defense of the Constitution that Citizens Project has been serving and protecting for the last year.

Separation of Church and State in America

Part of this effort against Citizens Project began months ago with an attempt to portray the constitutional doctrine of separation of church and state as alien, un-American and anti-Christian. This is a sad attempt at revisionist history.

The truth is that the doctrine of separation of church and state was created by our Founding Fathers because they knew the bitter fruits of sixteen centuries of religious war in Europe, where one religious sect after another attempted to gain control of the governments of Europe, and to use the power of the government to persecute those who believed differently. Even in the Twentieth Century we can see from Sarajevo to Belfast that the bitter fruits of religious war have a long life.

And the truth is that before we had separation of church and state, among the groups most commonly persecuted in the American colonies were the dissident sects, the forbearers of the modern Charismatics. The truth is that the Episcopalian, Presbyterian and Congregationalist framers of our Constitution rose to defend these small sects from the tyranny of theocracy by adopting the First Amendment to our Constitution.

At least into the 1960s, Christian evangelicals recognized that separation of church and state was essential to protecting religious freedom in this country. Indeed, evangelicals were especially vocal in insisting that president John F. Kennedy swear allegiance to the First Amendment and renounce all fealty to the Catholic Pope in governmental matters.

It is ironic that now, some two hundred years after their freedom of conscience was provided protection by the First Amendment, some evangelical leaders call separation of church and state an "anti-Christian myth." When these same leaders attack Citizens Project for its defense of the separation of church and state, they betray a lack of understanding of America's history as a democracy, and a lack of understanding of the concept that Christians should support freedom of conscience and religion not only when their views are being persecuted, but also when they have the power to impose their will on others. Christian evangelism is a voluntary enterprise, and it cannot and should not be coerced.

"It is ironic that now, some two hundred years after their freedom of conscience was provided protection by the First Amendment, some evangelical leaders call separation of church and state an 'anti-Christian myth.'

Tolerance and Diversity in Colorado Springs

There has also been a sustained effort in Colorado Springs to portray tolerance and diversity and respect for the free will of others as anti-Christian. This is a continuation of a centuries-long struggle within Christianity between those who adhere to the biblical first principles of love, tolerance and respect for the rights of others, and those who attempt to find in the Bible mean-spirited rules to exclude people different from themselves. We have seen this struggle a number of times in the past.

- We saw it in the Inquisition where Jews, Protestants, and non-conforming Catholics were put to death because they dared to think for themselves. But in the end the forces of tolerance and respect for diversity within Christianity won.

- We saw it in the institution of slavery, where the Bible was used for centuries to support the odious concept that whites were chosen by God to own and enslave blacks. But in the end those within Christianity who demanded respect for all members of the human family won.

- We saw it in the institution of racial segregation, where leaders like Jerry Falwell and Jimmy Swaggert preached that it was the biblical plan that blacks should live a separate and inferior existence from whites. But in the end, thank God, Martin Luther King and other Christians who believed all of us were created equal won.

- And we saw it when the Bible was used to support job discrimination against women. Here, once again, the forces of respect and tolerance within Christianity won.

Tolerance is not, nor has it ever been, anti-Christian. Indeed, the best of Christianity has always fostered respect for, and consistently fought for the dignity of, all members of the human family, and for the right of freedom of conscience.

Walta Continued

Christians in Relation to Citizens Project

In my view, Christians have nothing to fear from Citizens Project. Indeed, this organization supports ideals that are in the best traditions of Christianity. Let me give you some examples:

• It is not anti-Christian to speak out against Kevin Tebedo when he says to an audience composed of all different religions at the library debate: "In the end all your knees will bow to Jesus Christ whether you want to or not." This is not the language of respect; it is the old language of religious conflict and war.

• It is not anti-Christian to oppose Operation Rescue when it pickets a doctor's home and frightens his or her family. Christians should be supporters of everyone's right to a peaceful home and family—they should not be zealots who invade a person's home.

• It is not anti-Christian to oppose government-sponsored prayer for children in the public schools. One must remember that these children are a captive audience. Prayer should not be the business of government. Rather, it is a matter for individuals, for churches, and for families. To impose one sect's version of worship on children attending compulsory public education can only lead to religious conflicts, and it invades the right of parents to conduct the religious education of their children. This concept is as American as apple pie.

• It is not anti-Christian to oppose discrimination against homosexuals. Indeed, regardless of whether or not one sees homosexuality as a sin, it is hard to see how Christianity can be used to persecute or demean homosexuals. Christ befriended adultresses, criminals and sinners of all kinds—how can it be anti-Christian to follow the model of Christ?

The latest question is whether a student speaker at a graduation ceremony can as a matter of free speech ask the audience to join in a prayer. That is a difficult question. But, given the fact that so many of our valedictorians recently have been immigrants from the Far East, those Christians who support this position should be prepared to rise with that valedictorian and join in a prayer to Buddha.

In Closing

The people in Citizens Project have been courageous and have shown good judgment and common sense throughout the past year. We've been lucky to have you here.

Without question, times are going to be difficult here in Colorado Springs. But in God's good time, people will find ways to reach common ground together, and I know Citizens Project will play a key role in that effort! Thank you.

CP Neighborhood Groups

Interested in working with others in your neighborhood? Want to get more involved in your community? Consider joining or starting a Citizens Project neighborhood affiliate!

A neighborhood group can offer you the opportunity to meet with your friends and neighbors on an ongoing basis to discuss neighborhood and community issues of concern. Citizens Project wants to encourage people who would like to be part of an affiliated neighborhood group to take the time to become involved.

If you're be interested, call the Citizens Project office for a copy of our Neighborhood Group Handbook. Or, call the neighborhood group coordinator for your zip code:

80903	Greg Walters, 471-0056
80906	Judi Ellias-Ochs, 540-5791
80907	Jim Musante, 520-9453
80904/05	Ellene Shapiro, 632-2124
80829, 80863, and 80866	Ken Farmer, 685-4634
80840,80908, 80920, and 80921	Sue Aspenson, 488-9356
80909	Gordon Davitt, 473-3128
80918	Jay Norman, 260-5966 or Gary Betchan, 548-0882
80919	Gene Finkelstein, 594-4505
80915, 80917, 80922, 80831, 80817, 80910, 80911, 80913, 80914, 80916, 80925, 80926, 80929	Marj Webster, 630-0930

Neighborhood groups that have already scheduled meetings are listed below. If yours is not listed, call your coordinator for information!

Neighborhood Group Meetings

80904,05: August 8, 4 p.m.
Thorndale Park — Uintah and 24th

80909: Aug. 29, 6 p.m.
Call for details

80918: August 15, 7 p.m.
Denny's at Flintridge and Academy

80919: August 15, 7 p.m.
Eagleview Apartments Clubhouse
830 Vindicator

Typesetting of *Freedom Watch* contributed by Dennis Ritchie

SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY ISSUE
INSIDE:
General Meeting Report
Wafa Speech: Is Citizens
Project Anti-Christian?

FREEDOM WATCH
Citizens Project
Box 2085
Colorado Springs, CO 80901

BULK RATE
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
COLO. SPGS., CO
PERMIT No. 463

OUR VISION AND MISSION

Citizens Project has developed the following vision and mission statements to guide our work in the future.

Our Vision. We envision a community committed to working beyond ignorance, prejudice, and fear, where differences are respected, individual rights are protected, and diversity is celebrated.

Our Mission. Citizens Project is a grassroots organization in the Pikes Peak region dedicated to upholding the traditional American values of pluralism, freedom of religion, and separation of church and state. In accomplishing our mission, we will abide by the following principles: 1) we are committed to open and inclusive activities in which all voices in the community can be heard, 2) we are committed to modeling integrity by treating others with dignity, respect and equity, and 3) we are committed to developing plans of action appropriate to upholding the traditional American values of freedom of religion and separation of church and state within the community:

- we will study and investigate issues and organizations affecting the Pikes Peak region,
- we will inform and educate fairly and accurately,
- we will advocate the cause of victims of prejudice and discrimination,
- and we will confront those who threaten the rights of others.

I AGREE! We must promote increased tolerance and compassion for others in our community. I want to join the thousands of concerned residents who joined Citizens Project to stay informed and to challenge intolerant activities.

[ ] Please add my name to your mailing list. I look forward to receiving *Freedom Watch*, the Citizens Project Newsletter.

[ ] I have enclosed a contribution in support of your mission and to help offset the cost of printing and mailing. Here is a check for:

[ ] $20 [ ] $35 [ ] $50 [ ] $100 Other $_____

Name_____

Address_____

Please return to:

Citizens Project, Box 2085, Colorado Springs, Co 80901

Because we lobby to protect civil liberties, contributions are not tax-deductible.

This August newsletter is a special mailing to celebrate Citizens Project's first anniversary, to inform you about our last General Meeting, and to invite you to consider participating in Citizens Project neighborhood affiliate groups. Our regular newsletter will resume in September.

CITIZENS PROJECT
Box 2085
Colorado Springs, CO 80901
(719) 520-9899

Doug Triggs and Mike Shaver
Editors

♻ Printed on recycled paper.